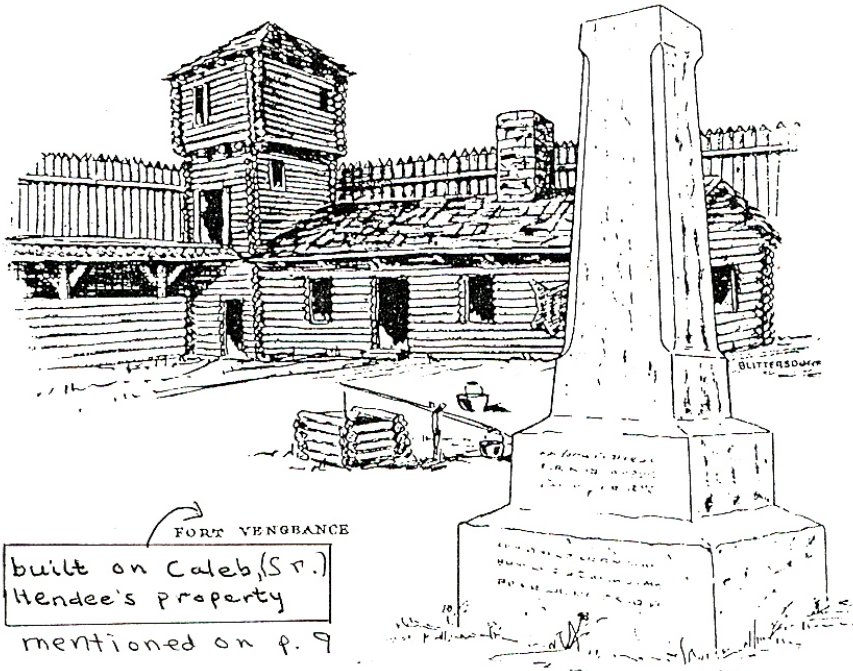


Pittsford Gleanings



PITTSFORD, VERMONT

EBENEZER ALLEN

CALEB HENDEE, Jr.

PITTSFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Volume II

Monument to Caleb Houghton,

p. 10 killed by Indians nearby -

see postcard & documentation / Cox

see p. 11 for reference to Isaac

Matson's capture by Indians. Isaac was half-brother of Caroline Ellsworth Hendee. His wife was sister of Caleb Hendee, Sr. (Martha).

In this bicentennial year, it seems appropriate that Pittsford Gleanings should feature stories of two men involved in our early history, both linked to Fort Vengeance. The life of Ebenezer Allen, commander at Pittsford's Ft. Vengeance in 1780, was researched for a Vermont History class at Community College. Only details of his public life could be found, like a two-hundred year-old puzzle with pieces gleaned from many sources.

Caleb Hendee Jr., on the other hand, left a written account of his life "for posterity" – **(which we have in our Hendee documents—very interesting Caleb, Jr. is one son of Caleb, Sr and Caroline and is the brother of our ancestor, David Hendee)** a very private view of his world, 1768 - 1854. A copy of Caleb's manuscript was sent to Jean Harvie from one of Caleb's descendants in Michigan. Caleb Hendee Sr. (our ancestor) owned the land on which Fort Vengeance was built.

This issue of Gleanings is dedicated to Jane Belcher whose enthusiastic support, as well as choice of the name "Gleanings," helped launch this little publication in 1989.

Editor: Grace Neil Anderson **(author of In the Shadow of Cox Mountain and Betsey Cox, First Generation Vermonter Cox Mt is about Grace's ancestors {Beulah and William Cox} during the American Revolution and features our ancestors Caleb (Sr.) and Caroline Ellsworth Hendee. Beulah Cox midwifed our ancestors with payment in seed potatoes and pumpkins. We have both books in our Hendee documents. It is quite an experience to read Cox Mt., which makes our ancestors come to life during this turbulent time in our country's history. Betsey also mentions Caleb and Caroline, but not much.)**

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Ebenezer Allen, Commander of Fort Vengeance

Pittsford Vermont, 1780

by Grace Neil Anderson

An observant traveler on Route 7 between Pittsford and Brandon may notice a monument on the west side of the road. This provides a fine spot to pull over and enjoy the view of the beautiful valley with its meandering Otter Creek. Anyone who reads the inscription on the monument will learn that once this lookout was the location of Fort Vengeance. They will also see mention of the sad story of Caleb Houghton.

What made a fort necessary in this peaceful valley? Who built the fort? Were battles fought? What was daily life like at this spot? In attempting to understand more of Fort Vengeance, I decided to research the life of one man, the man who designed the fort and was its first commander, an experienced leader with a combative nature and reputation for accomplishment, --Ebenezer Allen.

Ebenezer was distantly related to the famous Vermont Allens. He was born in Northampton Massachusetts on October 17, 1743. As his father died when he was young, Ebenezer as oldest son, gave up school to help support the family. In 1762 he married a Miss Richards. A description of Ebenezer was given by one book. "In appearance he was medium height, with a large head, in which the perceptive faculties were very prominent; black-eyed, dark featured, deep-chested, and endowed with more than ordinary physical strength and activity. In religion he was a Calvinist, in politics a Hamilton Federalist. He had great vigor and vivacity of spirit, courage, enterprise, perseverance. His disposition was frank and generous. He possessed a combative temperament."¹

Ebenezer was always looking for a better location. In 1768, he and his bride moved to Bennington, where they lived for three years, becoming an active member of the Green Mountain Boys along with his more famous relatives. From Bennington, the restless Allens moved to Poultney, living there long enough for the birth of a child who was the first white child born in that town. Next on the list of

residences was Tinnmouth. Ebenezer was a delegate from that town to various conventions, including the one of which the state constitution was written. Ebenezer always managed to find action. He was with Ethan when Fort Ticonderoga was captured in 1775. When Warner's regiment invaded Canada, he was a Lieutenant.

In the summer of 1777 General Burgoyne with British and Hessian troops invaded the colonies by way of lake Champlain, After the Battle of Hubbardton came the Battle of Bennington. Ebenezer had now risen to the rank of Captain in a company of minutemen in Herrick's regiment of Rangers. At Bennington, with only thirty men, he found cover under a natural breastwork of rocks, standing against the main body of the Hessian Baum's army. A hot and well-directed fire threw Baum's men into confusion and temporary retreat.

After this battle, Ebenezer was promoted to Major in the Rangers. In September of 1777, General Lincoln had the job of harassing or destroying forts on Champlain and Lake George that were part of Burgoyne's communications to the north. Under the charge of Gen. Jonathon Warner of Mass., there were three detachments of men sent to accomplish this, each with five hundred men. Col. John Brown's men, mostly Herrick's Rangers, included Major Ebenezer Allen. Col. Johnson of Newbury was sent with his men to threaten Mount Independence. Col. Woodbridge and his men went to Skenesborough to confuse the British as to their purpose, and perhaps help Brown.

The men marched at night, keeping in touch by the signal of hooting like owls. Warner was so slow that he and his men never reached any objective. Brown decided to give up his attempt to capture Ft. Ti, but did capture the landing at the foot of Lake George and nearby mills and blockhouse.

Allen was given a difficult job, trying to capture a well-fortified position on a high point of land overlooking Ft. Ticonderoga. He was apparently not one to give up, no matter the odds. His detachment of forty men scaled the rocky side of Mt. Defiance, at night. When they reached the last distance, the only way to ascend was for one man to step on the back of another. Once at the top, only eight men could be concealed. The British had two hundred men. Allen had his first men set up such a yelling that they confused the British and allowed the other Rangers to finish the climb. One poor Britain who started to light a cannon to fire was so frightened by Allen's threats that he ran off with the firebrand still in his hand. The overwhelmed British who were not immediately taken prisoner, streamed down the road to escape, only to be met by Allen's superior officer, Major Wait, and his men at the bottom of the hill.

Allen had never fired cannon, and tried his hand at it here. The cannon ball reached Mount Independence and killed one man. Allen asked Fort Ti to surrender, but was ignored. Perhaps he didn't have enough cannon to be a real threat. All the forces then returned to Skenesborough with captured ammunition and small arms, a few cannon, 293 prisoners, 150 bateaux plus 50 other vessels, among which were 17 gunboats and an armed sloop. They also freed over a hundred men captured by the British at Hubbardton.² Allen and others joined Gates and participated in the battle of Saratoga.

Later, after Burgoyne surrendered on October 17, the British troops at Fort Ti tried to escape to Canada. Copt. Ebenezer Allen caught up with their rear guard. Again, he used a ruse to confuse the British. Allen scattered his men in the woods, with orders to yell and make the enemy think the woods were full of Herrick's Rangers, called "white Indians" by the fearful English. Allen's small group captured "49 British, 100 horses, 12 yokes of oxen, 4 cows, 3 boats & &." according to a letter sent to General Gates by Thomas Chittenden.³

Allen's character is shown by his way of dealing with one of the persons captured. She was a black slave named Dinah Mattis, with her baby girl. Slavery was then legal in New York. However, Allen's conscience was stronger than any law. He gave her a certificate of emancipation, recorded in the office of the town clerk at Bennington. He said that he "is conscientious that it is not Right in the Sight of God to Keep Slaves. Since all prisses (prizes) belong to the Captivators thereof: and since all the men of his detachment had waved their property rights in the woman, he felt entitled to make her and her child free. He said further I give "Dinah Mattis and Nancy her child their freedom to pass and repass anywhere ... and to Trade and Traffick for herself and child as tho She were born free without being Mollsted by any Person or Persons."⁴ A different source gives the response of Judge (**Theophilus**) Harrington of Bennington to this unusual freeing of a slave. He said he would of "require a 'bill of sale' from God Almighty" as proof of ownership before he would put a person back to slavery.⁵ (**Theophilus Harrington was the brother of William Harrington, who**

was father of Caroline Harrington Hendee, wife of our ancestor David Hendee. See "Harrington Branch" in the big, black Phase I Hendee binder for another story on Theophilus and a slave being freed due to him.)

After the British were driven back to Canada, Congress played with the idea of another attempt at invading Canada. They planned to have Brig. Gen John Stark go north on Lake Champlain to St. John to destroy shipping. Lafayette would lead another force from the east. Col. Hay was to be at Ticonderoga and raise troops in Vermont to support Stark. Since Lake Champlain, and the Otter Creek valley were the highways for invasion from either direction, this gave importance to all fortifications and supplies which might sustain an army. Pittsford had the northernmost fort on the Otter Creek, although there were blockhouses at Middlebury and Vergennes, and a house with loopholes for defense of the ford in Weybridge. The fortification at Vergennes was called Ft. William or Ft. New Haven.

On March 6, 1776, Captain Ebenezer Allen was given instructions to raise troops and take a post at the fort in Vergennes having charge of scouting parties, keeping watch of enemy movements. Now begins a small connection with Pittsford history. Two Pittsford men, Sam Daniels and Joshua Woodward, had traveled north to Shelburne that cold March, hoping to get some grain which had been grown the previous year. Back in Pittsford, there was a shortage of food as farming had been interrupted when the battle at Hubbardton frightened some families into fleeing south, and men who stayed were busy in the militia.

One of the early settlers of Shelburne, Moses Parsons (or Pierson, according to which book you believe) had raised a large crop of wheat the previous year, but soon after it was harvested he was frightened by British and Indians into leaving his home. In March, under the protection of armed men commanded by Capt. Thomas Sawyer of Clarendon, he was attempting to thresh out the wheat. At night on March 12, being afraid of an attack, all the soldiers, the Pittsford men and the settlers, barricaded themselves in the Pierson's log home. An attack did come—a Tory sympathizer named Philo had seen them, skated on the lake to Canada, (interesting bit of information!) and came back with a force of British soldiers and Indians. At the first volley of guns through the windows, both Pittsford men were killed.

The Indians set fire to the house. Lieutenant Barnabas Barnum of Monkton was killed in putting out the blaze. Again, the Indians set the house on fire. This time, Captain Sawyer offered his watch to anyone who would put out the fire. This seemed impossible, with no more water in the house. However, Mrs. Pierson had been brewing beer, and there was a large barrel of it. A soldier named Joseph Williams cut a hole in the roof, and put out the fire with the beer while bullets whizzed around him. The attacking forces then gave up, leaving behind a dead British officer and an Indian, with possibly others dropped through a hole in the ice of the lake.⁶ After the attack on Shelburne was made, Ebenezer was ordered to relieve Captain Sawyer.

On March 13, 1776, the Continental Congress gave up the idea of attacking Canada and pulled all support from Vermont. The state was now on its own, with still-hostile forces to the north who might invade them.

In April, the Vermont Board of War decided that they could not try to guard citizens any further north than Pittsford and Castleton. Word of this decision was sent to all settlers in Panton, Addison, and Bridport. Col. Allen was ordered to help the settlers move south to the safety of the forts in Pittsford, Castleton and Rutland.

Canadian forces, meanwhile, had been aware of Continental plans to invade their territory. They did not learn that the plans were discontinued in March, and considered Vermont and Vermonters a great threat to them. Their response was the plan to have a force under Christopher Carleton invade Vermont and destroy all possible resources that would be used by invading Continentals.

Christopher Carleton was an unusual Englishman, in that he understood and respected the Indians, whom he had lived with for awhile. He was given a small force of regular British soldiers, German mercenary soldiers, loyalists and Indians to conduct what we would call a "scorched earth" policy along Lake Champlain and the Otter Creek, so that any Americans invading Canada would have no supplies. They set out in October of 1776, hoping to have their mission secret. At that time, Captain Allen was in charge at Crown Point. Two Hessian soldiers deserted from Carleton's band, and arrived at Crown Point after traveling for eight days. They told him that there were about 600 men coming south. Apparently Carleton's forces were too great for the few men in northern fortifications, as they did not have a battle. Carleton burned homes and supplies around Champlain and as far down the Otter as Vergennes, taking captives to Canada. The people in Pittsford had been warned, and were in fear of the invasion.

Throughout 1779, the people around Champlain and the Otter Creek valley were harassed by small groups of Indians and Tories. A scouting party from Fort Holt in Pittsford was captured on Lake Champlain and taken to Canada. Indians attacked Fort Mott, but were driven off.

In the fall of 1779, Indians killed several settlers in Neshobe (Brandon) and burned homes. This increased the alarm of the people in Pittsford. Fort Mott, or **(William) Cox's Fort**, had been built by the local formers after the Battle of Hubbardton. Pointed logs had been put in the ground in a circle around the home of William Cox, on the bank of the Otter Creek. There was no blockhouse, no room for barracks. It was merely an enclosure which afforded some protection for the surrounding settlers who had not fled south. Militia here didn't feel that Fort Mott could withstand the attack of a large force. Accordingly, they petitioned the Board of War to help them build a larger fort, which could house a larger garrison of soldiers. Pittsford had grown up beside the Crown Point military road, which had provided access for the first settlers. The original military road had followed the creek on the west side from Clarendon north. A later addition had gone from Clarendon to Rutland, then to Pittsford where it crossed the Otter Creek at the ford which gave the town its name. **(how Pittsford got its name)** On the west side of the creek the road branched, with one portion going directly west over the mountain to Fort Ticonderoga, and another going north-west to Crown Point.

The Board of War sent Major Allen to Pittsford to choose the best site for a new fort, and oversee its construction. The place chosen was about a mile north of the old fort, on higher ground, on the property of Mr. Caleb Hendee (Sr., our ancestor). It was described as follows in a letter written by Caleb Hendee: (See Cox Mt., pages 199 and 205 - 6) "Like all the other forts in Vermont, it was a picket fort; a trench was dug five or six feet deep, the trunks of trees, mostly hard maple and beech, a foot or a foot and a half in diameter, were sunk into the trench as closely together as possible, extending sixteen or eighteen feet above the ground and sharpened to a point at the top; between each log a stake was driven to fill the space left by the round, unhewed logs; within the pickets a breastwork was thrown up about six feet high and about six feet broad at the base, and composed entirely of dirt and logs. At a height convenient for the garrison were loop-holes between the logs, and large enough at the center for the barrel of a musket to pass through, and radiating outside and inside so that the soldiers within could move the muzzles of their guns in the loop-holes and command a wide range without, while the loop-holes were so far from the ground on the out-side that the enemy's shots coming through them would pass over the heads of the garrison. The form of the fort was square, enclosing an acre or more of ground. On each corner jutting outside was a flanker, with two stories, that is, a floor was laid across each about eight feet from the ground answering for a ceiling to the space below; above this floor or ceiling was the sentinel's box with loop-holes above and below, from which the musketeers could rake the approach to the fort in every direction with a deadly fire. On the east of the fort was a large double gate of oak plank thickly studded with large headed nails or spikes so as to be completely bullet proof, while on the west side of the fort was a wicket-gate.

When the fort was completed in June of 1780, Major Allen was in charge with about one hundred and fifty men. As the young soldiers had marched eighty miles to the fort. their clothes were dirty. Some of the women in homes nearby offered to wash the clothes. A soldier named Caleb Houghton went to the home of Sarah **(Cox) June** to recover his clean clothing. When he didn't come back in a reasonable time. some men were sent to see what was the trouble. They found that he had been killed by Indians. Mrs. June had seen him struggle, but was afraid to leave her home to tell the men at the fort.

Major Allen was furious. He called all the men to the front of the large gate and, vowing vengeance on all Indians in the area, broke a bottle of rum against the gate, christening it "Fort Vengeance." **(how the fort got its name)** They tried to find the Indians who had killed Caleb, but were not successful. In May of 1781, the British forces went into the valley of the Mohawk, and the Governor of New York asked Vermont for help. Major Ebenezer took up a march so quickly that he reached Mount Independence with over two hundred men the next day. It happened the enemy returned to Canada by a different route than expected, so there was no battle. The Major did receive a special commendation for acting so swiftly.

In the summer, a Pittsford man named Isaac Matson (half-brother of Caroline Ellsworth Hendee See Cox Mt. p. 211 - 213 and 243)) was taken prisoner and carried to Canada. Later, Mr. Samuel Crippen was also captured. The most famous event was the capture of Betsey Cox, (We have Grace Neil Anderson's book about her, Betsey Cox, First Generation Vermonter) the young daughter of the owner **(William Cox)** of Ft. Mott land. Several Indians and a local Tory, Roger Stevens,

jumped from behind a rock and captured Betsey, while her sister Sarah (**Cox June**) escaped. Roger persuaded the Indians to let Betsey have her freedom, after marching a short distance.

Fort Vengeance was kept garrisoned during 1781. Their scouts patrolled for Indians, and settlers come to the fort in time of danger. At one point, when the men were out trying to apprehend some Indians who had burned a house, only three men and some women were in the fort. Indians attacked. Women seized muskets along with the men, and drove off the attackers.

At this point in the (**Caverly's**) History of Pittsford, mention of Major Allen ceases, and a Capt. Brookins was in charge.

After the war, true to habit, Ebenezer moved again. In 1783 he and his family moved to S. Hero, being among the first settlers. They had a son who was the first white child born in S. Hero. Since the baby died very soon, he was also the first white person to die there. No mention is made of other children.

Histories do include an interesting note on Ebenezer's relationship to Ethan Allen after the war. In 1789, Ethan was living in Burlington. The previous year had been a poor one for hay. Ebenezer told Ethan there was plenty of hay on S. Hero if he wanted to come up for a load.

February 12, 1789, Ethan set out over the ice for S. Hero in a sleigh with a servant driving. Ebenezer called in old friends from the days of the Green Mountain Boys, and they had a party which lasted until almost dawn. Then Ethan set out for home. On the way or shortly after reaching home, he died. Ethan was only 51 years old.

Ebenezer held several public offices in S. Hero, including representative to the legislature when the agreement was signed for Vermont to join the Union in 1791. Somehow, between battles and moving and holding public office, this man had time to become fluent in several dialects of the Indian languages. (interesting) In 1792, he went on a journey with friendly Indians, exploring Ohio, Michigan and parts of Canada. He was so impressed by this new part of the country that he wanted to move again. His friends and family persuaded him not to go. However, other people did go there based on his descriptions of the land.

But did the gentleman live out his life in S. Hero? Oh no. In 1800, he moved to Burlington where he opened a tavern on the waterfront. He died there, at age 63. His wife moved back to S. Hero and lived until the ripe old age of 88. Poor woman, at last she could stay awhile in one place. Old histories didn't give much mention of women. The only mention of Mrs. Allen, other than the births of her children and long life, is from a journal quoted by Abby Hemmenway, which tells of a person visiting the Allen home and finding that the only food Mrs. Allen could share with them was a half a salmon. (interesting)

It has been very interesting to attempt to piece together the story of this man's life. Although he doesn't deserve any great place in Vermont history, I would call him one of the men to whom Burgoyne referred when he made his famous statement about the nature of Vermonters "The New Hampshire Grants in particular, a country unpeopled and almost unknown in the last war, now abounds in the most active and most rebellious race on the continent and hangs like a gathering storm on my left. Ebenezer Allen was a good example of the men who lived in our Pittsford valley during the days of the American Revolution, manning Fort Mott and then Fort Vengeance.

Notes

1. Ullery, Jacob History of Vermonters and Sons of Vermont Brattleboro, VI. Transcript Publ. Co. 1894 p. 54
2. Thompson, Charles Miner Independent Vermont Houghton Mifflin Co. Boston Riverside Press Cambridge p. 327
3. Hall, Hiland The Story of Vermont Albany, N.Y. Joel Munsell, 1868 p. 266
4. Thompson, Charles Miner *ibid.* p. 328
5. Ullery, Jacob *ibid.* p. 54
6. Washington, Ida and Paul Carleton's Raid Phoenix Publishing Canaan, N.H. 1977 p. 28

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